The growth of any law firm in today’s increasingly competitive environment requires client development skills. Simply stated, client development means the methods by which firms attract prospective clients and manage ongoing relationships with existing clients.

In order to get new business, firms not only need to make people aware of their existence, but they also need to provide information on the services they provide and offer a reason why potential clients should choose their firm instead of a rival firm.

**Traditional Methods**

Most law firms still rely on traditional advertising methods and word-of-mouth referrals. However, word of mouth, the phone book and billboards are no longer considered enough. Those days are gone. In today’s market, the key to successful client development, as in so many other areas of modern commerce, is technology.

**Keeping Up on the Web**

The fastest growing method of advertising/marketing for law firms today is the Internet. The online environment we all live in now has made it a requirement for firms to come to grips with this technological reality. Not having a website makes a statement about your firm that most people will not appreciate. And without a website, most people will not find you anyway. The Internet is the most important research tool for an ever-growing number of people. If they cannot find a Web presence for you, they simply will not consider you. As a result, not even the smallest firms can do without a website. And not just any website, but one that reflects well on the firm whether it is a solo practice or a legal behemoth. People want to deal with firms that inspire confidence by demonstrating that they are up to date and thoroughly conversant with the latest technology. By having a website, you show your clients that you embrace technology and that you are using state-of-the-art communication methods. Clients want technologically advanced firms.
Key Words and Blogs

The explosion in the popularity of social media has not bypassed attorneys. In addition to a firm website, many attorneys now have their own blogs. Many now take advantage of these sites to make themselves known. These blogs are used to discuss legal issues, past cases and current projects. There are, of course, ethical concerns to be taken into account when using these tools. State bar associations have regulations that must be obeyed, but many bars also provide guidance in how to use these sites in compliance with their rules.

It is important to monitor the content of your website for key words. Will someone doing an Internet search find you using the expected key terms? By conducting test searches, you can determine if your site is working to the greatest effect. For example, assume you are an estate-planning attorney in California, if a prospective client types in estate planning California, will your law firm’s name or your name show up on the first page of the list of results?

How Client and Matter Management Software Helps

According to Ms. Curfiss, a strong client and matter management software solution can help firms manage billing, calendaring, contacts, case management and client development. Properly implemented, a good client and matter management solution obviates the need for you to ever again search or handle paper files except when the need for original signed documents arises. Functioning as an in-house document management system, it saves time and effort by organizing all your files and by making everything accessible to everyone. Look for a system that seamlessly interfaces with Microsoft® Outlook® so that e-mail can be easily categorized and transferred into client files. Make sure the system has a contact list feature so that it can function as a firm rolodex, and include vital information on not just clients, but also judges, expert witnesses, opposing counsel and anyone else the firm might need to contact.

Prospective Clients

How does a client and matter management system help with client development? The first concern in client development is taking care of prospective clients. A powerful software solution will allow firm staff initially speaking with the prospective client to immediately enter the contact’s basic information into a template as well as things such as how the caller heard about the firm. This information is important for later analysis of the success of various marketing strategies. A brief description of the client’s problem or information request should be noted, an initial meeting should be scheduled and a primary attorney should be assigned. Any tasks that need to be performed in preparation for the initial meeting can also be input in the to-do list. Even billing information can be elicited and recorded.

Conflicts

All of this information, especially any client interactions or dispositions entered into the Notes section, is important in avoiding any conflicts. Look for a software solution that has a conflict feature which will search the entered information and alert you to any possible conflicts.

Existing Clients

Many firms overlook the importance of maintaining relationships with existing clients. After all, a happy client is a client who pays promptly. And relationships do not end when a particular matter comes to an end. Satisfied clients can be an invaluable source of future business either through additional cases of their own or from referrals. Your task is, therefore, twofold: attracting new business and maintaining or expanding existing relationships. There is a simple solution to handling these tasks.

Gaining a Technological Advantage

Katrina Curfiss, a consultant in law practice management and legal technology, has an extensive background in assisting firms with practice or client development. As president of The Legal Centre, a consultancy specializing in multiple law firm solutions, she has come to appreciate the benefits that a strong practice management software program can offer firms seeking to expand their client network.
Maintaining Relationships
How can a software program help with marketing to existing clients? By utilizing various records in association with classification codes in records such as Firm Events, Tasks and Notes, all marketing and client development activities can be tracked and monitored. Targeted lists can be generated for newsletters, holiday cards, firm social events and company news. Mailing lists and mailing labels can be created. You can customize all kinds of client data to suit your firm’s needs.

Generating Results
All of the information entered serves to generate reports and lists that can be used for client development, marketing and even human resources purposes. How are clients finding you?

This information will help you make a sound decision when allocating marketing dollars. If your expensive print advertising is producing far fewer clients than your sponsorship of charity events or the free seminars you offer during tax season, your budgeting priorities are clear. A report showing which attorneys are the most involved and successful in client development can make promotion and bonus decisions better informed.

Making The Right Choice
Ms. Curfiss states if you have trouble getting your system to perform all these functions, you have the wrong system. Every law firm needs a software program that can multitask, gather all critical data in one place, reflect information according to your needs and help you realize efficiencies for your firm to include increased client satisfaction and client development. And, in her opinion, Time Matters® is the premiere practice management software program and should be your firm’s choice.

Why LexisNexis
Running a successful firm means making the best use of your time and resources while reducing risks. LexisNexis® helps you increase productivity and gain peace of mind with award-winning tools and expert support that enables you to efficiently manage your firm and your finances, so you can spend more time practicing law.

For a competitive advantage, Time Matters software gives you a complete, centralized system for streamlined client, matter and communications management. Paperless, integrated matter management saves you time that you would otherwise spend filing and finding documents. Easy-to-use automated forms eliminate the need to retype information and reduces human errors. Easy-to-customize calendaring tools make sure that you hit every deadline right on time.

LexisNexis® Practice Management
Transforming the Business of Law
We take the headache out of the business of law. Our innovative Practice Management products, content and services enable you to more effectively serve your clients and manage your business.

To learn more, visit www.lexisnexis.com/law-firms/practice-management or call us at 1-800-328-2898.

This best practice article is based on the original “Growing Your Practice Using Time Matters®” Webinar presented by Katrina L. Curfiss, founder and CEO of Legal Centre, LLC. Ms. Curfiss specializes in assisting law firms in the areas of practice management through the use of technology and the implementation of new processes and procedures.